

# How to Start a Support Group

If you can't find a support group that meets your needs, consider starting one of your own. It's not a difficult thing to do. One simple way to do this is to invite several people you know to come to a meeting and encourage them to invite other friends as well. Setting it up with another person makes the process easier and more fun.

There are many options for groups and there is no one "right way" for a group to be. The following ideas may help:

- You may want to limit the number of members in your group. This will allow members of your group to connect with one another and share personal information. Group members can decide: whether the group is always open to new members or if they will only accept a certain number, or whether there is a deadline for joining.
- Decide when you want to meet and for how long. Many support groups meet in the evening, but they can meet any time that is convenient for the members.
- Find a place to hold the meetings. Libraries, churches, schools, hospitals and health care agencies often offer free space to groups. If there is a cost to using a space, you may have to ask members to pay dues or a fee each time they visit. If your group is small and is limited to a few people who know each other well, you may decide to hold the meetings in one person's home or to take turns hosting the meeting.

Depending on the kind of group you are starting, you may need to think about or discuss how you are going to get people to come to the group. You may want to:

- Ask each person who has worked on setting up the group to invite several friends or others he or she knows by personal invitation, phoning them, mailing them a note, or sending them an e-mail;
- Put a notice of the meetings in the local newspaper or newspapers;
- Ask your local radio station or stations to announce the group;
- Ask that the group be listed on your local community access television bulletin board; and/or
- Hang posters describing the group in places where interested people might congregate (for instance, if it is a group for people with a particular illness, you might put up posters in doctors' offices and hospital waiting rooms).

Formats for support groups vary widely. The members of the support group decide how they want the meetings to be. If things don't work well one way, the group can choose to do them another way.

Source: Mary Ellen Copeland [www.mentalhealthrecovery.com](http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com)